

In the year 64 A.D. Rome had a population estimated at from 750,000 to one million people. The city presented a colorful picture as through her classic streets rode or walked senators, consuls, generals, legionnaires, knights, bankers, tradesmen, richly garbed women, orientals, the masses, aliens and finally slaves from all ^{nations}. Nero ruled for time as a sort of master, but strictly speaking Rome acknowledged no such thing as autocrat. It had nominally no monarch; the emperor technically was not a super-sovereign, but supposedly something inferior, a sort of first citizen, and the state was nominally a commonwealth. But Nero besides being civil and military officer of all provinces containing an army, was commander-in-chief of all of Rome's fighting forces. He declared war and dictated peace. Theoretically such a commander might be deposed by the people acting through the senate, but the real deposing was the act of the army. It could, and finally did, get rid of Nero. His immense ego and his overt acts towards Romans led the army to order him to get out.

Nero had great power for awhile, , and if he wanted a certain law passed it was done. How he could perpetually interfere and yet remain a constitutional officer is interestingly explained. It was not through an obsequious senate or its officers; that method were too clumsy for Nero. "The necessity arose that he be clothed with the appearance of real authority," and Nero ingeniously met the issue, attending to that little detail himself, like other dictators have done in recent times. It was in this wise. Under the Commonwealth certain annual officers were given wide if indefinite powers, called "tribunes of the commons." These persons had veto power over laws they thought were in opposition to the interests of the common people. The tribune body may be likened to our supreme court. They could summon the Senate of some six hundred members, and their persons were sacrosanct during their terms. Nero saw an opening. He, like Mussolini, Hitler or Stalin, got himself invested with these powers of the tribunes. This enabled him to veto any measures with impunity. So it became the custom in Rome, as in more recent days, to find out the ruler's wishes beforehand and to act accordingly. As the tribunes were popular champions Nero artfully made it appear that he was the chief and perpetual defender of the masses.

Imagine a ruler who also had the veto power of the Supreme Court!

"He took the masses under his wing", writes Professor T. F. Tucker, "and saw among other things that they were fed and amused." He indulged the pampered rabble to almost the extent of b on-doggling. He gave them a corn dole of six or seven bushels of corn onthly, to make bread, and to many others he gave the equivalent of ten dollars a month in money. "To receive these doles you had", like in modern times, "to be on the list." Not all were starving of the odd 200,000 unemployed of Rome, yet only Roman citizens participated. Communists and aliens were debarred. The games and amusements were free to the rabble and kept them quiet.

There were taxes aplenty in those days, the chief of which were land and personal taxes, at times discretionary. There were strikes then as now. A provincial governor ended a baker's strike as interfering with social needs.

As Nero's ego grew he even had himself made "Pontifex Maximus", or chief guardian of religion, and was called "princeps", or head of the state; and Augustus, something akin to "His Highness." With it all he was glad at times to fall back on the senate in pretending to keep up a constitutional appearance. The senate at times became servile, because intimidated; at other times it rebelled against his measures. Many senators, highborn, proud nobles, came of better ancestry than the emperor himself, and so hated emperors as usurpers.

Most senators were rich, some having as much as fifteen million dollars. Usually a man nominated by Nero for the Senate was elected. Caligula arrogantly declared he could make his horse consul if he wanted to, with some degree of truth. An account of the various classes of Romans would be interesting. Twice each month or oftener in the Senate house gathered this great deliberative body of senators.

Towards the end of Nero's rule his vanity, eccentricity and tyranny took the shape of cruelty, insult and blunder in Rome itself. In A.D. 64, at twenty-four years, he had ruled as emperor for ten years. He was educated slightly in philosophy, music and letters. He spoke both Greek and Latin. When he played the harp in public he had paid cheer-leaders to applaud. He had a colossal effigy built of himself one hundred and twenty feet high. He became bankrupt, when he began attacks on the wealthy classes and gave flimsy excuses for all kinds of confiscation. His schemes for raising money differed little from others more modern.

The Senate and Nero grew to like each other less and less, yet the situation remained somewhat that of a modern nation ruled by a virtual dictator assisted by a house of peers or representatives, and Nero's tribune powers, while they could not be pleaded to be emergency powers, gave him for a time

enormous control over Rome and its citizens. In his favor it must be admitted he never conceived or put into operation anything like "A.A. or potato control." Before he made his inglorious exit he devalued Roman coins about 25%,
He was the first emperor of Rome to do this.

debasement of the standard coin, the silver denarius. His debts, making him desperate, his violence increased. He caused his mother to be murdered, also many friends and citizens. "Poisoning, strangling, drowning or a command explicit or implied, to depart this life, were his ways of shaking off any incubus upon a free indulgence of his will," says Tucker. His appearances in chariot races were ridiculous; he was thrown out of his car, had to be lifted into it again, yet nevertheless was crowned victor all the same. Nero required his visitors to be acceptably dressed, but was careless as to his own appearance, wearing a tunic, or a wrapper of silk with a handkerchief around his neck, while his shoes were often found unlaced. In appearance he was of good height, his skin was blotched, his hair was yellow; his eyes grayish-blue, his neck thick, and he was protuberant below the waist; his legs were slender.

He met the end of many another Roman Emperor; the people could not put up with his demands and excesses. His army gave him a polite invitation to go and commit suicide and while he demurred he accepted the invitation. "What an artist the world is losing!" he exclaimed as he died, showing his ego stuck with him to the last.

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